**Mark 9:14-29 September 12, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 9 here re-reading these words. “And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, ‘how long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Baptism is our lives, because Baptism is the creation of faith, and faith is the receiver of eternal life won for us by Jesus Christ himself. To overlook Baptism is to overlook the cross, it’s to overlook the incarnation, it’s to overlook the whole Christian life because without Baptism there is no connection between man and the wonderful gifts of God. And yet too often the Baptismal font isn’t seen or remembered, the date of your baptism is forgotten, the baptism certificate, cloth, or banner is sitting in some baby box in a closet or storage unit and probably never seen or thought of again after the day that you received it. But it should not be so. Baptism is very important, Martin Luther speaks about it at length in his writings, and also in the small catechism. It is one of the 6 chief parts. Baptism is explicitly commanded by Jesus Christ in the great commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commaned you.” Baptism is the shield against the guilt and shame that Satan brings against God’s children, because no matter how horrible you feel or how convicted you are in your sin and shame, you can remember proudly and gladly that you are God’s own child. And nothing can take that from you. Nothing can come and snatch it away. You can extinguish this fire of faith, you can neglect it, and not feed it, and let it die, but nothing can come and overthrow you and force you to lose your status as God’s redeemed child. No one can snatch you out of his protective hand. And that truth is conveyed at your Baptism. Something that is done primarily in our Lutheran Church when someone is a child, which makes it a very unique situation of teaching, because Baptism is actually a very violent sacrament even if we don’t recognize it.

The Gospel of Mark is a straightforward, no nonsense, and faster paced Gospel than Matthew, Luke, or John. It also is blunt and violent. We live in a world of violence. We live in a world of inconvenient and unfortunate truths. I think that was the biggest takeaway in my mind throughout this past week as we remembered the events of September 11th 2001. I think that was impact of the events of September 11, 2001, which we just remembered the 20th anniversary of yesterday, it completely changed people’s worldviews. I was only 15 at the time, a freshmen in high school, I’m not going to stand up here and pretend that I remember all the changes that happened after that event or speak like I’m some sort of expert, but the definition of what a terrorist seeks to accomplish is right there in the name. They did what they did to inflict terror, to take lives, to cause chaos, and to show our country that there are people who hate us. This was a wake up call, and it wasn’t a pleasant one. People lost their lives, and everyone had to face the horror of what happened that day. You couldn’t hide anyone from it. That’s a part of life that we don’t really dwell on much, censoring the hard truths, sterilizing the conversation or the world around us so that we don’t have to think about things that are rather unpleasant, but true. It’s the same in our faith. It’s the same in the life of Jesus Christ.

The majority of us here gathered today I would imagine are meat eaters. If you’re a hunter, then you know that killing and butchering an animal is very bloody business. If you go to a butcher and ask to watch them work you’ll see how it really is, but if you just walk to the meat section at Meijer, you’ll see a nice piece of meat in a package. We don’t dwell on the hard truth of where the meat came from, we just enjoy the result of it. In the same way, our Baptism is the death of the old Adam, it’s the drowning of them, and this is violent language. We don’t really dwell on it, but this enemy of our faith, this sinful self that seeks only our destruction, like the demon in our Gospel lesson who throws this poor boy into fire and water seeking to destroy him, and convulses him and seizes him and makes him foam at the mouth, this enemy wants to see us die. And he has to be destroyed. In Baptism he is drowned in the water so that a new man may arise to live before God. It’s what Luther is talking about in the Flood Prayer. Just as the unbelievers died outside the flood, just as Pharaoh’s army died in the Red Sea, this foreshadowed our own Baptisms. And it is violent, and unpleasant, but it’s true that we have enemies who seek to destroy us, and that we have to eliminate them.

We don’t see scenes like our Gospel lesson often in our lives. We don’t see desperation like that of this father who brings his son who is under demon possession. Usually in our lives as Christians and in the church everything is similarly sterilized. Things are in their proper order. If someone were to burst through those doors we would ask them to be quiet and if there is an emergency we would handle it later or privately. Our lives as Christians focus on the good stuff, the hymns of praise, the happy songs, the worship service with everything done perfectly and in good order and then we go on with our lives. We may give a few dollars to different charities or groups, or stay for a cup of coffee and some treats, but we don’t dive into our lives of sin or expose the problems that lie underneath. We are shielded from those hard truths and we can get the impression that our faith is all sunshine and happy days, and not the reality that the Bible speaks of. The truth is this, we serve a crucified Lord, we worship and adore a man who was innocent of any wrong doing and yet was beaten and killed on a cross. The truth is we are in a church, which many such buildings have a layout that looks like an ark or a boat, and which is described as a place of rest but also a place of protection, a place where you have to be defended from enemies. We just sang about how Jesus was our Strength and Tower, a tower was something used as a lookout for enemies, we are members of the Church Militant, and if you have a military it means that you need to be defended from those who want to hurt you. There are enemies who want to hurt us, the world around us that wants to tempt us to abandon our faith and our beliefs, Satan and his demons who seek to destroy us, even our own sinful nature that is a good swimmer and won’t stay drowned but as Luther speaks must be daily drowned again through contrition and repentance. Again I remind you he says, daily. This isn’t an easy life, to be a child of God. Mark’s Gospel doesn’t sugarcoat it, Jesus is gruff here, and angry with the faithlessness that he sees around him. “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” Do you really think Jesus isn’t saying the same about our generation today? Have things changed? Do we see faithfulness today in our world? No. And we can’t just ignore these words, and not read them. We can’t sterilize them and forget them and censor them because of how they make us feel. Meat comes from a dead animal, it’s a fact of life. There are those who hate our country and hate us for living in it, it’s a fact of life. Sin is separation, sin brings death, sin brings violence, and we are covered in sin, we willingly commit sin, we do things wrong and need forgiveness, it’s a fact of life.

The hope we have is that we have been adopted into God’s family through the waters of Holy Baptism. The hope we have is that in our desperation to find relief from the violence of this world we turn to Jesus, not in some last ditch effort hoping that he can do something, not saying the words of the father who says, “Jesus, if you can” but rather knowing that He can, because He has already done the violent work of dying on the cross to save us from our sins. It’s not a question of if he is with us or if he cares or if he loves us, not for us, not when we have the Word of God that clearly reveals his power, and his presence, and his love. Not when we have our Baptisms to look back on and know that He has washed away our sin and clothed us in His perfect righteousness. There is no uncertainty in our lives as Christians, we have the proof in God’s Word and looking back on all that Jesus did. For today it’s seeing how Jesus, even in the midst of frustration over a faithless generation, still saved a boy from demon possession and gave him his life back. That’s one picture of his preserving and loving care. But we also can remember our nation, and how God has blessed us to live in a country of religious freedom where even after the horrible events 20 years ago, we could gather to pray and worship and mourn. Where we can still remember the families of those affected and pray for peace. Where we have enemies, but also we honor those who serve in the vocations that curb evil and violence and keep us safe. We don’t have to hide from these hard truths of life, we face them head on with the confidence of being God’s child, with the cross that was placed at our baptism still both upon our forehead and upon our hearts to mark us as God’s redeemed and bought back child.

So face the challenges that your enemies throw in front of you head on, with the knowledge of God’s love and providing care for you, with the remembrance of your Baptism giving you courage and strength, and knowing that no matter how hard the battle rages, and how bad it can seem to get out in the world around you, you have a fortress, a tower of strength, a place to be restored and uplifted and equipped with everything you need, and that you have a friend in Jesus Christ, who has your back and forgives you your sins, who loves you, died for you and rose so that you have eternal life. Eternal life that you receive not by your own strength, but through faith, faith created in your Baptism.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.